



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## Washington potatoes win access to Japanese markets

**OLYMPIA** – Washington’s potato farmers will have access to an important new market now that Japan has agreed to allow the importation of potatoes used to make potato chips. Washington is among 14 states that won initial access to the Japanese market.

“This is a great win for family farmers in our state,” said Gov. Chris Gregoire. “I’m very pleased that even modest-size Washington farms will be able to participate in this new opportunity. Communities across Washington will feel the positive impact in the local economy. This victory is an example of what we can do when we work closely with the industry and our foreign trading partners.”

The Japanese market had been closed to U.S. potato growers because Japan has been concerned about unwanted plant diseases and pests. Washington government and industry officials have been working for years to allay those concerns.

During the trade mission to Japan last September, Gov. Gregoire, Valoria Loveland, the director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture and members of the Washington State Potato Commission met with Hiroyuki Kinoshita, Vice Minister for International Affairs at the agriculture ministry. The Washington delegation stressed the need for the completion of the Japanese pest risk assessment that would open the door to shipments of Washington chipping potatoes.

“Working with our state’s potato growers, we were able to identify this wonderful opportunity in Japan,” said Loveland. “The agency was able to find some resources and, in cooperation with potato producers, educate potato chip manufacturers in Japan about our world-class products. The last piece of the puzzle was to remove this governmental barrier.”

In 2001, WSDA approved a \$50,000 grant to develop seminars held in Japan for potato chip manufacturers. The 50 leading Japanese snack food companies attended the seminars and industry officials were impressed with the quality and price of the potatoes Washington farmers are able to supply.

“What a great opportunity for Washington’s potato growers,” said Matt Harris of the Washington State Potato Commission. “The industry has been fighting for 25 years for access to the Japanese market, and through this broad partnership of government leaders and private industry, we are finally successful.”

To meet import requirements, all dirt from the Washington potatoes must be washed or brushed off. The potatoes, which must be shipped in sealed containers, may only be used for making potato chips.

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Washington continues to lead the nation in the production of potatoes used for processed foods, such as potato chips. The state's farmers produced \$460 million in potatoes in 2004, the latest available sales statistics. Japan, the state's leading export market for agricultural products, already imports \$1 billion in food products each year.

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